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The Washington Post

Israel's Arab Spring problem

David Ignatius <http://www.washingtonpost.com/david-ignatius/2011/02/17/ABXXcOJ_page.html>

July 6 – JERUSALEM -- Whatever else that might be said about the Arab revolutions, it's obvious that they pose a problem for Israel. But how bad, and what should the Israeli government do to hedge its risks? I heard some interesting — but not very encouraging — ideas on this subject from top government officials last week.

To sum up: Most officials think that relations with the Arabs are gradually going to get worse, perhaps for decades, before democracy really takes root and the Arab public, perhaps, will be ready to accept the Jewish state. The challenge for Israel is how to avoid inflaming Arab public opinion, a newly important factor, while protecting the country.

The trouble ahead is symbolized by the election of Mohamed Morsi <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/morsi-named-new-egyptian-president/2012/06/24/gJQAMZaazV_story.html> , a Muslim Brotherhood leader, as president of Egypt. His inauguration <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/islamist-morsi-is-sworn-in-as-president-of-egypt/2012/06/30/gJQA84vZDW_story.html> prompted a wary message of congratulation from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, expressing hope that -Israeli-Egyptian relations will be cooperative and based on mutual interest. The statement masked deep Israeli anxieties.

Netanyahu fears an erosion of the relationship with Egypt over time and wants to slow that process, if possible, while preparing for potential trouble. Netanyahu is said to view these precautions as the equivalent of putting up shutters before a storm.

The most obvious test will be Gaza, where the militant Hamas leadership is closely allied with the Muslim Brotherhood. Netanyahu has tried to de-escalate crises that have arisen, but if rocket attacks increase, they may draw a harsh Israeli military reaction — which could worsen relations with Cairo.

Efraim Halevy, the former Mossad chief, says Israel should face reality and begin talking with Hamas. But others stress the growing threat in Gaza: Israel has intelligence that militants there have tried to buy shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles from Libya, and the Israeli air force now operates on the assumption that such missiles are present in Gaza, in addition to the array of other rockets.

The Sinai Peninsula is another flash point. This vast desert is becoming a lawless area where al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups are trying to find a haven. Intelligence officials here believe the extremists' strategy is to provoke an Israeli retaliation and thereby encourage an unraveling of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty. I didn't hear any clear formula for how Israel can respond to attacks without falling into this trap.

The chill in Israel's relationship with Turkey adds to the dangers of instability in Egypt, Libya and Syria. Netanyahu has responded by seeking new allies, including:

- A "Balkan arc" anchored by newly closer relations with Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. Some of those countries allow the Israeli air force to train in their airspace, providing an alternative to the now-unfriendly skies over Turkey.
- An implicit, if unspoken, alliance with Saudi Arabia and other gulf states against Iran and against Muslim Brotherhood extremism. In this silent courtship, the Israelis are offering an alternative to an America that's no longer seen as a reliable protector of the conservative gulf regimes.
- New links with governments in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Kenya, Uganda and the Ivory Coast, which are worried that the rise of militant Islam in North Africa will spread south.

Israeli leaders know these new friendships, however useful, won't alter the basic threat posed by an Arab awakening that, in most countries, has empowered militant Islamic groups. Within the government, there's a range of views about just how bad the future will be, but nobody uses the congenial phrase "the Arab Spring" that has been common in the West.

Among the optimists, relatively speaking, is said to be Defense Minister Ehud Barak. He thinks Egypt and other neighbors will move toward a version of the "Turkish model" of Islamic democracy, which may be cool toward Israel but will also be pragmatic. Barak thinks Israel can't simply wait for the storm to pass. The process of change is irreversible and may eventually be benign as the Arab societies mature.

A darker view is taken by some of the officials who know the Arab world best. They think that for at least the next several years, as Morsi and other Muslim Brotherhood leaders try to consolidate power, they may appear cooperative. But at the core of the Brotherhood's ideology is rejection of Israel, and any compromises with Israel will be tactical moves, rather than real peace.

Israel's existence, never easy, has gotten more complicated and unpredictable. "We are still inside this huge historical shift," says one senior official, "and we don't know where it's going to take us."

Article 2.

World-crunch

No Israel, Time Is Not On Your Side

Dominique Moïsi

July 6th, 2012 - More than a year ago, Israel's reaction to the Arab Spring <<http://worldcrunch.com/israel-starting-feel-touch-arab-spring/3489>> was perceived as a cautious wait-and-see attitude, as one more reason to maintain the status quo with the Palestinians. In any case, says Jerusalem, exactly with whom should we be negotiating? The Palestinian Authority is no longer considered representative of the people; and Hamas, its rival, is a terrorist organization. After the second round of the Egyptian presidential election <<http://worldcrunch.com/california-engineer-muslim-brother-meet-egypts-new-president-mohamed-morsi/5722>> , the Israelis felt confirmed in their skepticism. Didn't history appear to agree with them? They can't imagine the Egyptians -- Islamists or not -- foregoing a cold peace for a hot war. Egypt just doesn't have the financial resources to launch such a reckless adventure. One wonders if it knows how it will pay public employees in four to five months.

But the Egyptian people's participation in the decision-making process, and a long-term evolution that will necessarily run counter to the army's interests, does not suit Israel. The country used to boast about being the only democracy of the region but now regrets the good old stability and predictability of its despotic neighbors.

Nothing good can come from the Arab Spring, according to Israeli leaders, neither for the populations directly concerned nor for Israel itself. The absolute calm on the southern border with Egypt enabled Jerusalem to fully concentrate on the Iranian nuclear menace <<http://worldcrunch.com/posturing-or-preparing-war-what-s-behind-israel>>

s-tough-words-iran/4073> and to forge an implicit alliance with Saudi Arabia based on a common threat. For the Sunni monarchies in the Gulf, isn't the existence of a nuclear, Shiite Iran <<http://worldcrunch.com/yet-another-round-iranian-nuclear-talks-fail-where-now/5695>> as much a threat to their existence as it is to the Jewish State <<http://worldcrunch.com/new-battle-change-what-it-means-be-jewish-israel/4064>> ? Other potentially instable borders are the ones with Syria <<http://worldcrunch.com/israels-syria-conundrum/2905>> and Lebanon. Predicting the unavoidable fall of the Syrian regime as Israeli leaders regularly do isn't just "standing on the right side of history," it's also, as for Iran, taking a common position with the Gulf monarchies. Israel is clearly taking advantage of a violent and confusing situation that helps divert the world's attention from the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The more events speed up in the Arab world through this long-term revolutionary process, the more it appears possible for Israel to keep the status quo on the ground with the Palestinians; a political status quo that doesn't prevent Israeli settlements <<http://worldcrunch.com/israel-s-enemy-within-why-radical-west-bank-settlers-put-country-risk/4322>> , far from it. Around Jerusalem, the situation -- with multiple faits accomplis -- has become inextricable. It would take hundreds of geographers and surveyors to negotiate every inch of an acceptable compromise.

In such a situation, when ones arrives in Israel -- despite the rockets that strike the south of the country from the Sinai -- it isn't surprising to be struck by a feeling of almost unreal serenity. Is this, like a decade ago, the calm before the storm? Are we on the verge of a third Intifada, closer to the first than the second (protests by stone-throwing as opposed to human bombs)?

What is sure is that there is among many young Palestinians an undeniable form of religious and political radicalization. The convergence between rising Islamism in the Arab world and the humiliation and despair of the Palestinian youth is pushing them to abandon all spirit of compromise. "Because I am nothing, I want everything, all of Palestine, without its Jewish occupiers!"

The contrast is much too important between the movements that are speeding up at Israel's borders and the frozen situation in the Palestinian territories. Of course, compared to the current Syrian situation, they might seem better off, and they don't want to renew the "savagery" of the second Intifada. But a man cannot live on bread alone. He needs hope, and Palestinians have none. In the Middle East, in spite of appearances, time is not working in Israel's favor. <<http://worldcrunch.com/rage-and-diplomacy-has-israel-lost-its-last-allies-muslim-world/3745>>

Article 3.

The National Interest

Egypt's Demographic and Environmental Time Bombs

Geoffrey Kemp <<http://nationalinterest.org/profile/geoffrey-kemp>>

July 6, 2012 -- It may take many months for Egyptians to learn whether the Muslim Brotherhood and its newly elected President Mohamed Morsi have achieved meaningful power or whether the Egyptian Army remains the true broker in the country. Either way, whoever emerges as the de facto leader of Egypt will be faced with the awkward reality of more fundamental indicators—Egypt's demography, geography, economy and environment. These pose predicaments that threaten to overwhelm the country.

Egypt's current population is around eighty-two million, with an annual growth rate of about 2 percent. The population could reach nearly 115 million in about fifteen years. Most of the population resides in the lush Nile Delta

and along the narrow strip of greenery along its banks that runs through the center of the country. The actual land area occupied by this huge population is small—larger than Maryland, smaller than the Netherlands.

The bulk of the population falls between the ages of fourteen and thirty-four. People of this age group historically have been much more active in seeking social change, and at present they have a tough lot—unemployment among people between twenty and twenty-four is at 47 percent <<http://www.acus.org/egyptsource/egypts-next-president-will-inherit-unemployment-crisis>> [3], even though many are well educated. Opportunities, especially the secure government jobs that many across the Middle East dream of, are limited. High birth rates are creating job seekers faster than Egypt's weak finances can create opportunities for them.

Egypt depends on foreign food supplies and is the world's largest importer of wheat and second-largest importer of maize. These commodities, which have seen sky-high prices, must be paid for in foreign currency. The latest figures suggest Egypt's foreign reserves are down to the equivalent of \$15.5 billion, scarcely surpassing those of Bolivia or tiny Croatia. This amount covers only about three months of vital imports. To make matters worse, two of its major sources of foreign income—natural-gas exports and tourism—have seen a precipitous decline since the Arab upheavals. Egypt increasingly relies on Suez Canal revenues and remittances from foreign workers, but many of the latter no longer contribute since the problems across North Africa have cut job opportunities.

Without loans from world financial institutions, Egypt will go bankrupt unless it instigates rigorous reforms. But any austerity measures will be extremely unpopular with the underclasses, which expect to see their lives improve now that the Mubarak regime has been removed. In the past, Egypt's autocrats have bought off the poor population—a quarter <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/33378/Business/Economy/Quarter-of-Egyptians-now-living-in-poverty-State-d.aspx>> [4] live on less than \$500 a year, 40 percent <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204059804577228984285910816.html>> [5] on less than \$2 a day—with subsidies on fuel and bread. These subsidies are now worth almost 10 percent <<http://www.cfr.org/egypt/reforming-egypts-untenable-subsidies/p27885>> [6] of Egypt's GDP and do as much to create black markets as they do to help those in need.

And then there are the environmental challenges. The Nile, without which Egypt cannot survive, is under pressure from both south and north. To the south, the river rises in Ethiopia (the Blue Nile) and Uganda (the White Nile) and flows through the two Sudans. These primary upper-riparian states are home to a combined 168 million people, a number that continues to grow. They need more water from the Nile for hydroelectric projects and irrigation schemes. At the same time, higher levels of evaporation and lower rainfall due to climate change are reducing the amount of water feeding the great river. These developments are slowing the flow and altering the quality of water reaching Egypt, thereby reducing agricultural yields. There are no multilaterally binding water agreements among all the states that share the Nile. Until such agreements on water sharing are reached, serious incidents including violence over water rights are possible.

To the north, the Nile Delta faces the challenge of rising sea levels in the Mediterranean. This is increasing the salinity of its soil, in some cases making land uninhabitable. It has made farming more costly. Farmers have taken to buying bags of sand and spreading them over their land to isolate their plants from the salty soil. All the while, growing populations are reducing the land available for farming. This phenomenon is not unique to Egypt. Similar environmental challenges face low-lying coastal regions from Southeast Asia to the southeastern United States.

Thus, it doesn't really matter what ideology Egypt's leaders claim to espouse. Addressing the fundamentals of the fragile economy must be their priority. This will require cooperation with their neighbors, Europe, the UN, major financial institutions and other world players such as the United States, China, Japan and South Korea. This suggests that any Egyptian government that gets distracted by other issues—whether a messy fight with Israel over the Sinai or domestic quarrels over Islamic traditions such as headdresses and alcohol consumption—will reap a whirlwind of discontent as basic challenges go unaddressed and the economic situation goes from bad to worse. Vigorous, swift action is essential to avoid a disaster.

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Article 4.

The Washington Institute

The Muslim Brotherhood's Long Game: Egypt's Ruling Party Plots Its Path to Power

Eric Trager <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/trager-eric>>

July 6, 2012 -- In the 18 months since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood has risen swiftly from the cave to the castle. It founded the now-dominant Freedom and Justice Party last April, won a massive plurality in the winter parliamentary elections, and, last week, celebrated as its candidate, Mohamed Morsi, won Egypt's presidential elections. After 84 years of using its nationwide social services networks to build an Islamic state in Egypt from the ground up, the Brotherhood is, for the first time, poised to shape Egyptian society from the top down. There is, however, a catch: most of the Brotherhood's gains exist in name only. In early June, a court order invalidated the parliamentary elections and dissolved the Brotherhood-dominated parliament. Then, just prior to the second round of the presidential elections, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) issued a constitutional declaration that seized executive authority from the presidency, ultimately rendering Morsi a mostly powerless figure. But after weeks of mounting tension with the SCAF, including mass demonstrations against the junta's power grab, the Brotherhood is dialing things down. It fears that agitating for more authority now could foment unrest and alienate a deeply divided public. It is also wary of what happened in Algeria in 1991, when the country's military-backed government responded to the electoral victory of an Islamist party with a harsh crackdown that culminated in civil war. To avoid further violence and cement its place in Egyptian politics, the Brotherhood now hopes to create a period of calm in the short run so that it can act more assertively in the future. To begin with, the Brotherhood is attempting to forge a unified front with Egypt's other political parties. It began these efforts a week before the announcement of Morsi's victory to dissuade the SCAF from rigging the elections for Mubarak-era candidate Ahmed Shafik. During two days of intense negotiations, Morsi met with a wide spectrum of political groups and activists, promising to name a woman and a Christian as vice presidents and to appoint a cabinet that would not be dominated by the Brotherhood. Brotherhood leaders have used this agreement to prove that they intend to build a representative government. "We are standing with all political powers for the same demands," Brotherhood parliamentarian Khaled Deeb told me.

Yet this is not the first time that the Brotherhood has attempted to insulate itself by aligning with other factions, and history suggests that these agreements are typically short-lived. In June 2011, the Brotherhood joined the nationalist Wafd party in creating the Democratic Alliance for Egypt, an electoral coalition that at one point included approximately forty political parties ranging from socialist to Salafist. But by September, the Democratic Alliance broke down over the Brotherhood's insistence on reserving 40 percent of the coalition's candidacies for its own members, thereby leaving too few seats to satisfy its other partners, most of whom bolted. It hardly mattered: three months of unity enabled the Brotherhood to build its profile as a leading political entity, and it ultimately won a 47-percent plurality in the winter parliamentary elections. The Brotherhood's current unity project appears destined for the same fate. Despite initial reports that Brotherhood figures would fill only 30 percent of the new cabinet, Brotherhood parliamentary leader Farid Ismail recently said in Al-Ahram that the organization may take up to half. The Brotherhood also seems intent on controlling the cabinet selection process to ensure that many non-Brotherhood ministers are non-

ideological experts who are balanced out by Brotherhood-affiliated deputy ministers. "We have more than one [Brotherhood] candidate for each cabinet position, and some of those might be deputies," Brotherhood parliamentary leader Saad al-Husseini told me. "And we might nominate someone from a technocratic [background] or ask the other parties for nominations."

The Brotherhood's promise to nominate a Christian and female vice president is also more about symbolism than genuine power sharing. Brotherhood sources have suggested that Morsi may appoint up to five vice presidents, thereby watering down the influence of the Christian and female deputies. Moreover, to prevent Morsi from being succeeded by either a woman or a Copt in the event of his death, the Brotherhood will seek to maintain the current constitutional clause mandating that the speaker of the parliament -- currently Brotherhood leader Saad al-Katatny -- assume the presidency. "A state with a Muslim majority can't be ruled by a non-Muslim," Brotherhood Guidance Office leader Mahmoud Hussein told me, citing a sharia principle. The second prong of the Brotherhood's strategy for temporary calm involves its coordination with the military. "This relationship was established from the first day," Deeb, the Brotherhood parliamentarian, told me. "No clash, no total agreement." In the week leading up to the announcement of Morsi's victory, Brotherhood leaders Katatny and Khairat al-Shater, among others, met frequently with SCAF generals, apparently hashing out a deal to ensure Morsi's election while tabling other areas of disagreement. The existence of these meetings, which now include Morsi, have led to a shift in the Brotherhood's rhetoric. After months of accusing the SCAF of seeking to engineer the presidential elections and stage a coup, Brotherhood leaders are now praising the SCAF's stewardship. At an inaugural event on Saturday, Morsi declared, "The SCAF has fulfilled its promises and the oath it made, to not be an alternative to popular will." The Brotherhood has also signaled that it will now accept several key SCAF demands that it had previously opposed. In this vein, immediately after his electoral victory was announced, Morsi stated that he would only be sworn in before the parliament, thereby pressuring the SCAF to reverse the parliament's dissolution. Yet he ultimately agreed to be sworn in before the Supreme Constitutional Court, which implicitly recognized the validity of the SCAF's constitutional declaration. Brotherhood leaders have also intimated that they can live with the power that the SCAF appropriated to itself via the constitutional declaration, at least for now. "The constitutional declaration doesn't give the SCAF full power -- just the right for legislation," al-Husseini, the Brotherhood parliamentary leader, told me. "The president has veto power." The Brotherhood even seems willing to accept SCAF's autonomy over military budgets, a key SCAF demand, so long as a small civilian committee is briefed on the details. "I can't bring the military budget in front of the parliament and discuss it publicly," Brotherhood parliamentarian Azza al-Garf told me. "It should be discussed among a few people in parliament secretly." As a result, the military's vast business holdings, which are said to encompass between 15 and 40 percent of the Egyptian economy, appear safe for the time being.

The Brotherhood's arrangement with the SCAF is not surprising. It is consistent with the organization's long-held strategy of avoiding confrontation with more powerful authorities by negotiating the extent of its political activities. In fact, Morsi was the Brotherhood's point man in these negotiations during the last five years of Mubarak's rule, using the dealings to coordinate the Brotherhood's participation in parliamentary elections and limited interaction with various protest movements. As a cohesive, 84 year-old society, the Brotherhood typically places organizational goals, such as achieving power incrementally, over broader societal goals, such as ending autocratic rule more immediately. "Our program is a long-term one, not a short-term one," Morsi told me in August 2010. "If we are rushing things, then I don't think that this leads to a real stable position." This hardly means, however, that the Brotherhood intends to accommodate the military indefinitely. Last November, for example, the SCAF and the Brotherhood struck a deal in which the Brotherhood agreed to avoid violent Tahrir Square protests in exchange for the SCAF's agreement to hold parliamentary elections on time. But the pact broke down in March, when the SCAF first threatened to dissolve the parliament and the Brotherhood suddenly dropped its promise that it would not run a presidential candidate. Moreover, the Brotherhood appears unlikely to accept long-term limits on the authority that it has won in the elections. "The army is owned by the people," said Brotherhood parliamentarian Osama Suleiman told me. "[Civilian oversight of the military] is the popular will -- and nobody can stop popular will." In short, the long-anticipated confrontation between the SCAF and Brotherhood has been delayed -- and, for that, many Egyptians are thankful. After all, Cairo seemed on the brink of disaster a few weeks ago, when tens of thousands of mostly Islamist protesters packed Tahrir Square, some declaring themselves ready to die if Shafik was named president. But the current calm, and the Brotherhood's attempt to appear

inclusive while also accommodating the SCAF, will not last. The Brotherhood will use this period to build its legitimacy as Egypt's next ruling party, and resume its push for more authority once the temperature cools down.

Eric Trager is the Next Generation fellow at The Washington Institute.

Article 5.

NYT

Why Russia Is Backing Syria

Ruslan Pukhov

July 6, 2012 -- Moscow -- MANY in the West believe that Russia's support for Syria stems from Moscow's desire to profit from selling arms to Bashar al-Assad's government and maintain its naval facility at the Syrian port of Tartus. But these speculations are superficial and misguided. The real reason that Russia is resisting strong international action against the Assad regime is that it fears the spread of Islamic radicalism and the erosion of its superpower status in a world where Western nations are increasingly undertaking unilateral military interventions.

Since 2005, Russian defense contracts with Syria have amounted to only about \$5.5 billion — mostly to modernize Syria's air force and air defenses. And although Syria had been making its scheduled payments in a fairly timely manner, many contracts were delayed by Russia for political reasons. A contract for four MiG-31E fighter planes was annulled altogether. And recently it became known that Russia had actually halted the planned delivery of S-300 mobile anti-aircraft missile systems to Syria.

Syria is among Russia's significant customers, but it is by no means one of the key buyers of Russian arms — accounting for just 5 percent of Russia's global arms sales in 2011. Indeed, Russia has long refrained from supplying Damascus with the most powerful weapons systems so as to avoid angering Israel and the West — sometimes to the detriment of Russia's commercial and political ties with Syria.

To put it plainly, arms sales to Syria today do not have any significance for Russia from either a commercial or a military-technological standpoint, and Syria isn't an especially important partner in military-technological cooperation.

Indeed, Russia could quite easily resell weapons ordered by the Syrians (especially the most expensive items, like fighter jets and missile systems) to third parties, thus minimizing its losses. And even if the Assad government survives, it will be much weaker and is unlikely to be able to continue buying Russian arms.

The Russian Navy's logistical support facility at Tartus is similarly unimportant. It essentially amounts to two floating moorings, a couple of warehouses, a barracks and a few buildings. On shore, there are no more than 50 seamen. For the Navy, the facility in Tartus has more symbolic than practical significance. It can't serve as a support base for deploying naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea, and even visits by Russian military ships are carried out more for demonstrative purposes than out of any real need to replenish supplies.

Russia's current Syria policy basically boils down to supporting the Assad government and preventing a foreign intervention aimed at overthrowing it, as happened in Libya. President Vladimir V. Putin is simply channeling public opinion and the expert consensus while playing his customary role as the protector of Russian interests who curtails the willfulness of the West.

Many Russians believe that the collapse of the Assad government would be tantamount to the loss of Russia's last client and ally in the Middle East and the final elimination of traces of former Soviet prowess there — illusory as those traces may be. They believe that Western intervention in Syria (which Russia cannot counter militarily) would be an intentional profanation of one of the few remaining symbols of Russia's status as a great world power.

Such attitudes are further buttressed by widespread pessimism about the eventual outcome of the Arab Spring, and the Syrian revolution in particular. Most Russian observers believe that Arab revolutions have completely destabilized the region and cleared the road to power for the Islamists. In Moscow, secular authoritarian governments are seen as the sole realistic alternative to Islamic dominance.

The continuing struggles in Arab countries are seen as a battle by those who wear neckties against those who do not wear them. Russians have long suffered from terrorism and extremism at the hands of Islamists in the northern Caucasus, and they are therefore firmly on the side of those who wear neckties.

To people in Moscow, Mr. Assad appears not so much as "a bad dictator" but as a secular leader struggling with an uprising of Islamist barbarians. The active support from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey's Islamist government for rebels in Syria only heightens suspicions in Russia about the Islamist nature of the current opposition in Syria and rebels throughout the Middle East.

Finally, Russians are angry about the West's propensity for unilateral interventionism — not to mention the blatantly broad interpretation of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council and the direct violations of those resolutions in Libya.

According to this view, the West, led by America, demonstrated its cynicism, perfidy and a typical policy of double standards. That's why all the Western moralizing and calls for intervention in Syria are perceived by the Russian public as yet another manifestation of cynical hypocrisy of the worst kind.

There is no doubt that preserving his own power is also on Mr. Putin's mind as his authoritarian government begins to wobble in the face of growing protests that enjoy political approval and support from the West. He cannot but sympathize with Mr. Assad as a fellow autocratic ruler struggling with outside interference in domestic affairs.

But ideological solidarity is a secondary factor at best. Mr. Putin is capitalizing on traditional Russian suspicions of the West, and his support for Mr. Assad is based on the firm conviction that an Islamist-led revolution in Syria, especially one that receives support through the intervention of Western and Arab states, will seriously harm Russia's long-term interests.

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Article 6.

The Daily Beast

Are Israeli Agents Assassinating Iranian Scientists? A New Book Argues

Dan Raviv <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/contributors/dan-raviv.html>> , Yossi Melman

July 7, 2012 -- Another wave of hangings by Iran's Islamic government is expected, after officials announced that twenty Iranians were arrested, allegedly for helping Israel assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/01/13/has-israel-been-killing-iran-s-nuclear-scientists.html>> . Executions are just a matter of time, as Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) is out to show that it is not completely helpless in the face of four assassinations and one failed attempt in the streets of the capital, Tehran, over the last two years. Israeli officials refuse to comment on who specifically might be guilty or innocent, but they publicly expressed their joy that "God's finger" had acted against Iran's nuclear program. They also indicate that no credence should be placed in the "confessions" that will doubtless be televised by Iran. Before Majid Jamali Fashi was hanged two months ago, as the convicted "murderer" of a nuclear scientist in January 2010, the 24-year-old kick boxer was shown on official TV reciting a tale of having been flown to Israel for training by the Mossad. His interrogators, who probably wrote the confession for him, had seen far too many B-movies about spies and were wrong on many details, including the location of Mossad headquarters.

Our in-depth study of fifty years of assassinations by Israel's foreign espionage agency—including conversations with current and former Mossad operatives and those who work with them in countries friendly to Israel—yields the conclusion that Fashi and the twenty other suspects now being held were not the killers. The methods, communications, transportation, and even the innovative bombs used in the Tehran killings are too sensitive for the Mossad to share with foreign freelancers. Instead, the assassinations are likely the work of Israel's special spy unit for the most delicate missions: a kind of Mossad within the Mossad called Kidon (Bayonet). Kidon operatives are even more innovative, braver, and physically fitter than other Mossad men and women. Again and again, they have fulfilled their missions without leaving much of a trace. The Israeli government has never confirmed Kidon's existence or its actions.

The assassinations of physicists and nuclear scientists in Iran have been what Israelis call "blue and white" operations, referring to the colors of their nation's flag. Without giving full details, senior Israeli officials have revealed that fact to counterparts in the CIA and the White House. In at least one instance, U.S. officials were obviously displeased that the Mossad took action at a delicate juncture in multilateral nuclear talks with Iran.

Although Iran has no diplomatic relations with Israel and bans any visits by Israelis, Mossad operatives seem to have no trouble entering and leaving the country. Despite being a heavily patrolled police state, Iran has long borders that stretch across mountains and wasteland. Two of the neighboring former Soviet republics, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, provide an excellent launching pad for cross-border penetrations. Also, for over half a century now, the Mossad has cultivated close cooperation with Kurds—who were stateless, but now run the Kurdish autonomous zone of northern Iraq which borders Iran. Israel used to secretly help Kurds when they were oppressed by Iraq's government, and the Mossad has excelled in living by the ancient dictum that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Israeli intelligence has also expressed an interest in collaborating with disaffected minority groups inside Iran. Meir Dagan—the director of the Mossad from 2002 through 2010—was quoted in a State Department cable obtained and released by Wikileaks. He is said to have told a senior American official in 2007 that disaffection among Baluchi,

Azeri, and Kurdish minorities could be exploited by the United States and Israel. In addition, Dagan suggested supporting student pro-democracy activists, if only to cause unrest inside Iran.

The official summary said Dagan felt sure that the U.S. and Israel could “change the ruling regime in Iran and its attitude toward backing terror regimes,” and that “we could also get them to delay their nuclear project.” According to the cable, Dagan said, “The economy is hurting, and this is provoking a real crisis among Iran’s leaders.” The minority groups that the Mossad and CIA could support or exploit are “raising their heads and are tempted to resort to violence.”

Economic woes and high unemployment have only become worse in Iran, as U.S.-led sanctions have begun to bite. From the Mossad’s perspective, unhappy and aimless young males in Iran represent an opportunity to recruit sources of information, agents who can be trained, and even mercenary or rebel armies.

Yet for such a sensitive, dangerous, and daring mission as a series of assassinations in Iran’s capital, the Mossad would not depend on hired-gun mercenaries. They would be considered far less trustworthy, and there was hardly any chance that the Mossad would reveal to non-Israelis the unique methods developed by the Kidon unit.

Mossad chief Dagan was pleased by the missions in Iran and the “cleanliness” of their execution: no clues, no fingerprints, not even motorcycles left behind.

Naturally, no one in Jerusalem was talking about any operational details of how Israelis entered and left Iran—or where they stayed while inside the Islamic Republic. Since the beginning of the State of Israel in 1948, its covert operatives have never found it difficult to masquerade as locals in every corner of the vast Middle East.

There were many possibilities. Obviously, Israeli operatives traveled using the passports of other countries, including bogus documents produced by skilled Mossad forgers and genuine passports where the photographs might be altered slightly. The spy agency’s use of phony, borrowed, and probably stolen non-Israeli passports has been inadvertently revealed several times, over many years. After a Mossad team led by Kidon assassins killed a Palestinian Islamist militant in a hotel in Dubai in January of 2010, the local police chief gleefully displayed video footage from security cameras that showed surveillance teams doing their shadowy work—frequently changing wigs and eyeglasses—and even the men wearing tennis whites, shorts, and others with baseball caps who were almost certainly the killers.

The police chief, General Dahi Khalfan, showed the visages of 27 men and women, displaying photos from their apparently bogus passports. Although the British, Australian, and Irish governments expressed anger at the Mossad for abusing their passports, diplomatic damage to Israel was minimal. In fact, Meir Dagan was fully satisfied with the outcome of the Dubai operation: The target—Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, in charge of arms acquisition for Hamas—was dead. All the Mossad operatives returned safely to Israel. And no one was arrested or even accurately named.

Over the years, some stories about Kidon’s prowess have leaked to the public. With the little that was known about them, The Team’s operatives were considered synonymous—in Israel and outside—with assassins, liquidators, and murderers.

More broadly, there is a Mossad mythology that is based on decades of half-truths and rumors. Many of those stemmed from the secret agency’s “war of the spooks” against Palestinian radicals in the 1970s all over Europe—as a response to the massacre of eleven Israeli athletes at the Summer Olympic games in Munich, Germany, in September of 1972.

“Our attitude was that in order to defend ourselves, we have to go on the attack,” former Mossad chief Zvi Zamir told us. “Those who accuse us of being motivated simply by revenge are talking nonsense. We didn’t wage a vendetta campaign against individuals. It was a war against an organization, aiming to halt and prevent concrete terrorist plans. We concentrated on what was expected to happen.”

Zamir's analysts found it satisfying that PLO activists in Europe and at their headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon—rather than devoting their energies to terrorist planning—were now looking over their shoulders, out of fear that they themselves were about to be attacked.

The truth, however, about the myth is that since the Mossad's creation in the early 1950s, it has been involved in only a few dozen killing operations—certainly fewer than 50. But the public imagination worldwide has been captured by the notion of constant assassinations, and the Mossad might find it difficult to refute the image with facts. So it does not bother.

Dagan clearly believed in assassinations, and he did not shy away from planning missions in the heart of enemy countries. A Kidon squad managed to plant itself in Damascus, Syria, long enough to locate and kill Imad Mughniyeh in February of 2008. Mughniyeh, the Hezbollah faction's military chief and a veteran hijacker and bomber, had long been on America's list of most wanted terrorists.

Overall, Dagan could be proud that during his eight years in charge, there were more killings by the Mossad in enemy or "target" countries—Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates—than ever before. In the past, such activities had mostly been confined to the safer "base" countries where Israelis did not necessarily have to pretend to be something else. The change to a bolder pattern was the "dagger between the Mossad's teeth" that Ariel Sharon, the prime minister who appointed Dagan, had demanded.

Despite tactical successes in Iran, the Mossad and its top political master—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—know that the entire Iranian nuclear weapons program will not be demolished by assassinations of nuclear scientists and military officers.

Yet, any delay in Iran's nuclear work represents an achievement for Israel. Their strategic thinking—exercised in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere—holds that temporary disruptions to an enemy's dangerous projects are sufficient cause for taking significant risks.

This was even truer when it came to killing Iranian specialists, who worked on unique tasks that required years of study. These men were not available in abundant supply, despite Iran's relatively large and advanced technological infrastructure. The assassinations have also had a strong psychological objective: sending a loud and clear message to scientists that working for the nuclear program was dangerous. The Mossad was telling them, in effect: Stay in your classrooms. Do your academic work. Get your research published. Enjoy the university life. But do not help Iran go nuclear. Otherwise, your career could be cut short by a bullet or a bomb.

Indeed, Israeli intelligence noticed that the assassination campaign was paying off, with what it called "white defections": Iranian scientists were scared, many contemplated leaving the program, and some actually did.

With rare exceptions, they did not depart Iran and defect to the Western or Israeli side, but they dissociated themselves from the nuclear program. There were also indications of scientists being reluctant to join the program, despite lucrative terms offered by the Iranian government.

The intimidation campaign definitely showed an impact on foreigners. While in the past, Chinese, Russians, Pakistanis and others were happily accepting invitations—and high pay—to work in Iran, the only ones who still seemed attracted were North Koreans.

Mossad chief Dagan was pleased by the missions in Iran and the "cleanliness" of their execution: no clues, no fingerprints, not even motorcycles left behind. Iranian authorities could only guess who was attacking, in broad daylight, in their capital.

Yet the deeply intimidating impact that Dagan aimed to create in Iran seems to be exhausted. This is apparent to Tamir Pardo, the new head of the Mossad who had been Dagan's deputy. (Dagan actually advised Netanyahu to

appoint another candidate.) The baby-faced Pardo is soft spoken, but his body language is misleading. Pardo is no less shrewd and cunning than his predecessor.

But the new director has a reputation for knowing that one should not push one's luck too far. Iran is becoming more dangerous for Mossad and other foreign intelligence operatives. One can expect a halt, at least temporarily, of the assassination campaign.

Dagan, in retirement, has become outspoken in his opposition to a military strike by Israel against Iran. He warns that retaliation by Iran and its proxies could be highly damaging to normal life in the Jewish state. Dagan also believes that an attack by Israel would unite most Iranians around their regime and would give Iran's scientists and engineers a major reason to speed up their underground nuclear work.

His private advice boils down to pointing out that there is still plenty of disruption to be accomplished within Iran by sabotage, assassinations, and a truly innovative weapon—cyberwarfare. The worm called Stuxnet <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/06/17/the-stuxnet-leak-was-a-valuable-warning-shot.html>> , that took over Iranian nuclear lab computers, was a product of Israeli and U.S. intelligence agencies working together; and it was not the only computer virus created by the highly skilled programmers in both nations.

While Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak seem highly skeptical that international economic sanctions will persuade Iran to cancel its nuclear bomb program, Dagan and other former and current intelligence officials believe that sanctions are biting and could be a major factor in the ayatollahs' thinking.

Dagan, in particular, seemed unconcerned by Barak's public warning that Iran was entering a "zone of immunity"—a situation in which air raids by Israel's limited air force could not reliably destroy a good deal of Iran's nuclear potential. Dagan seems confident that, in order to prevent Iran from developing nukes, the United States would attack Iran. His analysis is guided by years of close ties with the George W. Bush and the Obama administrations. "I always prefer that Americans will do it," he told the very few journalists he has met since he left office.

Dagan sees a strong possibility that, depending on circumstances, the United States will strike at Iran. He told Mossad staff members that economic factors in the modern world are powerful. He explained that he carefully studied the motivations of American leaders in formulating foreign policy and realized that the United States went to war in Iraq—twice—because of energy interests.

Dagan, it seems, has reached the conclusion that the U.S. would not allow Iran to have nuclear weapons—not only out of concern that a messianic Shi'ite regime might use the bomb or intimidate Israel—but mainly because Iran would become the most powerful nation among energy producers.

The United States, in the world according to Dagan, would not permit that to happen.

Article 7.

Fikra Forum

A Disconnected Gulf <<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2370>>

Joshua Jacobs <<http://fikraforum.org/?author=120>>

July 6th -- For Mohammed Morsi the silence must seem deafening. After days of anxious waiting and mass demonstrations the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) finally certified Mr. Morsi as the winner in the Egyptian elections, making him the first democratically elected president in Egyptian history. But if the Egyptian street was jubilant, only a short skip over the Red Sea the Gulf States were mired in uniform dejection.

In Saudi Arabia, arguably the most powerful and influential Arab state at the moment, the royal authorities did not even deign to mention the election, let alone congratulate Mr. Morsi on his victory. It was not until a full day had passed that the royal court issued a short note of congratulations. Further eastward the reception was not much better. In the UAE the official note of congratulation was curt and failed to even mention Mr. Morsi's name, while Ahmed Shafiq the president elect's former opponent was given safe harbor in the country only a day after the election. Likewise the reception was firmly polite in Kuwait and Jordan.

The reason why is easy enough to understand, and many analysts have already touched on it. Almost all of these monarchies have had deeply antagonistic and violent relationships with the Muslim brotherhood in the past. For Saudi Arabia in particular the re-emergence of civil-political Islam poses an existential threat to a Kingdom. The al-Saud fortify their legitimacy via their clerical alliance and their self-appointed roles as promoters and defenders of Islam. The rise of an alternative brand of Islamic politics remains at the core of the Kingdom's deepest fears. While for the rest the mere existence of a populist Islamic political movement poses a threat due to fears over its potential popularity and what the Egyptian example might mean for their countries. It is a legitimate and cheerful fear.

While the Gulf governments and their allies spent much of the past week grudgingly offering support, their press outlets and commentators were singing a different tune. In Saudi Arabia official grumbling had a mixed effect on the press reaction to say the least. Outlets like Asharq Alawsat and the Saudi Gazette (the Kingdoms largest English daily) castigated the Egyptian military establishment as a "junta" in their articles, and cheered the victory of Morsi devoting significant time to the celebrations in Cairo. In Kuwait several prominent figures including the head of the legislative assembly Ahmed al-Sadoun spoke to Al-Khabar news and offered glowing praise for Morsi, and added their satisfaction that attempts by "Arab countries" to manipulate the election had failed. In the UAE the prominent Gulf News, Khaleej Times, and Gulf Today followed a similar note, and even took the time to cover large ex-patriot celebrations in the Emirates.

To avoid going through media outlets one by one it is helpful to generalize by saying that the regional media trend more or less followed this pattern, outliers and state outlets not withstanding. The lexicon and style of coverage for the military and Shafiq was invariably negative, while that of Morsi or the protesters was positive, both before and immediately following the election certification. The lesson is one that should seem obvious: the citizens of the Gulf are excited by the notion of political representation. For more than a year analysts have been repeating the refrain that the governments of the Gulf fear the multitude of Arab uprisings as precursors to their own troubles.

But now the Gulf monarchies are confronted with what is arguably a worse prospect than a violent uprising, a civil one. For decades the only legitimate elections in the Muslim world took place in secular Turkey, easy to dismiss as a cultural and political outlier. Now the rise of democracy in Egypt even with all its remaining hurdles stands as a direct challenge to the Gulf mode of government. The more peaceful, stable, and prosperous the new Egyptian political system proves to be, the greater the impact will be.

Admittedly it is unlikely that Saudi or Emirati citizens will gather in the streets waiving petitions in their hands anytime soon. But the precedent is now being established in Egypt, and the status-quo cannot be maintained, even in Saudi Arabia, forever. Perhaps Mr. Morsi said it best during his victory speech "the revolution continues."

Article 8.

NOW Lebanon

Can Hezbollah give war a chance?

Michael Young

July 6, 2012 -- This week there were fresh strains in the relationship between the followers of Michel Aoun and Hezbollah, as Christian and Muslim parliamentarians split over a scheme to permanently hire Electricité du Liban contractual workers. The Aounists argue that the plan, devised by the parliament speaker, Nabih Berri, favors his Amal base, and accused <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/45419-suleiman-constitutional-council-to-decide-on-edl-workers-employment-as-sharp-differences-loom> Hezbollah of doing nothing to neutralize the dispute.

More interesting than that scrap over sectarian quotas was how the context affects Hezbollah. The party is already facing a Shia community in ebullition. Economic conditions are harder than ever; state services are in disarray; security in key Shia districts, including the southern suburbs and the Bekaa, has declined; and now, Hezbollah's ties with its Christian partners are under stress, even if this is unlikely to turn into a full-fledged rift. Moreover, the party has failed to liberate Shia pilgrims abducted in Syria, despite early promises that they would be set free, and Shia have been expelled from Gulf states because they are associated with Hezbollah and Iran.

This is not necessarily the beginning of the end for Hezbollah. But it could be the end of the beginning—of that phase when Hezbollah's supporters imagined the party was incapable of doing wrong. Hezbollah dominates the government and most of the security bodies, and has great sway over the army. It has chased its main rival, Saad Hariri, out of the country, replacing him with a prime minister of its choice. And yet what does Hezbollah have to show for all that authority? A Lebanese state that has never seemed so dysfunctional.

Meanwhile, the party's principal Arab ally, Syria, is going through a savage conflict that will, in all likelihood, eventually lead to the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Hezbollah has not only morally supported Assad against his own people; it stands accused of actively participating in the repression. This poses problems for a party that claims to speak on behalf of the deprived, and whose legitimacy was built on what it described as resistance to Israeli oppression.

How does all this affect Hezbollah's strategic objectives, above all its ability to act as Iran's vanguard in the Levant? The party has continued to underline in one way or another that its fighting capacity, like its deterrence capability, is undiminished. No one doubts that Hezbollah has the weapons to retaliate against Israel if necessary—for instance if Tehran requests this of the party following an Israeli attack against Iranian nuclear facilities.

However, less clear is whether Hezbollah has both the political and logistical props in Lebanese society that would be needed to pursue a confrontation with Israel. War is not just about weaponry; it involves myriad intangibles that Hezbollah would need to secure before carrying Lebanon into what is bound to be a devastating altercation, one far worse than what we experienced in summer 2006.

And here, the picture is very hazy indeed. An Assad regime under duress might yet be able to send arms to Hezbollah in the midst of a battle with Israel. Indeed, it could be tempted to send what is most destructive in Syria's arsenal, even chemical weapons, though what Hezbollah would choose to do with such material is a different matter.

But what of Shia morale and Lebanese national solidarity behind Hezbollah, essential ingredients in defining the latitude the party has to engage in a war, sustain it and even escalate if necessary? On both levels Hezbollah is facing serious problems. For a start, the party would have to ensure that a war looks like self-defense, which is no easy task. Lebanon's Shia will back Hezbollah against patent Israeli aggression, but it is much more questionable whether they would do so on behalf of Iran, in defense of its nuclear program.

That said, the Shia community, given the uncertainty it is facing, does not relish the prospect of war under any circumstances. The Shia have too often suffered, too often served as cannon fodder, to readily allow Hezbollah to put them through the ringer once again. Nor will there be anywhere near the same amounts of money available for reconstruction after a forthcoming war (if one takes place) as there was six years ago. Unless destroyed Shia towns and villages are rebuilt quickly, Hezbollah's standing could suffer in a decisive way.

As for national solidarity, Hezbollah can dream on. A majority of Sunnis, even those bitterly hostile to Israel, loathes the party. The Druze, who would absorb the first wave of Shia refugees, cannot forget how Hezbollah attacked their mountains in May 2008.

As for the Christians, the purported camaraderie between the Aounists and Hezbollah is not what it was, and the disagreement over the EDL contract workers highlighted this. Ironically, collaboration in the government has put a distance between the two sides, with the Aounists and Hezbollah pursuing incompatible objectives. Nor were the ties ever strong on the ground in the first place, despite efforts by naïve observers to read into the rapport something intense and novel.

Other than the bombing of the coastal highway and relay antennas, Christian areas were largely spared during the 2006 war. In any future conflagration, the Israelis are bound to hit a wider swathe of infrastructure targets, including the electricity grid, which will bring the war home for many Christians. Whether Hezbollah's friends or foes, most Christians see no rationale for a war, would blame Hezbollah for doing Iran's bidding, and would resent paying (as would everyone else) the hefty financial price that ensues.

Worrisome in all this is that Israel is watching closely. Will the Israelis be inclined, if they feel that Hezbollah is vulnerable, to initiate an assault themselves in order to do away with the party? That would be terribly foolish, but it cannot be discounted. All certitudes when it comes to Hezbollah are changing, slowly but surely.

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